



**K**ARL MARX would not have believed it!

That a Communist leader professing atheism and looking upon religion as the "opiate of the masses" should journey to Rome for an *official* visit with the head of the world's largest *religious* body!

#### Paving the Way

The historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and Marshal Josip Broz Tito came about as a result of the warming relations between the Vatican and Yugoslavia ever since the two established formal diplomatic ties last August. This was a first for a Communist nation. In fact, the one and one-half hour conference was one of the longest audiences the Pontiff has ever granted.

Marshal Tito has been known as a maverick in the Communist world from the moment he broke with Stalin in 1948. Economically he has been pursuing an evermore liberal policy both at home and with regard to foreign trade. Politically, he was one of the first to become a champion of the cause of the nonaligned nations, readily accepting aid from both East and West.

Inasmuch as Pope Paul has likewise been attempting to steer a nonaligned

course in his dealings with the nations, the two have a mutual interest on common ground. Of late, headlines such as "The Pope, the Undeclared Ally of the Nonaligned" have appeared often in the Yugoslav press. The articles that followed were full of praise for the Pope, his foreign secretary Archbishop Casaroli and in general, the Vatican's role in international politics.

According to the Zagreb *Vjesnik*, the two hold identical views on such key problems as the Middle East, Vietnam, the role of the U.N., nonalignment and world peace. In fact, as the Catholic magazine *Commonweal* puts it, "... It is certain that nowhere, except perhaps in the Vatican's own *Osservatore Romano*, are Pope Paul and the Vatican Curia more wholeheartedly endorsed than they are in Yugoslavia's 'Communist' press" (*Commonweal*, October 9, 1970, p. 36).

Although Yugoslavia is a Communist state, the Catholic Church is still an important force *within* the country itself. Constituting 32 percent of the population, Roman Catholics are nonetheless the great majority in the northern republics of Croatia and Slovenia — which are the richest and most industrialized parts of the nation. President

Tito himself was born to a Catholic Croatian family.

In recent years persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia has entirely ceased — and in fact precisely the opposite has been transpiring: for example, in Croatia, the Communist Central Committee is now working in harmony with the local bishops. At the present time the Catholic clergy enjoys freedom of movement and expression including use of mass media — as do other Christian religious denominations and also the Moslem and Jewish communities.

Thus a harmonious ring was in the air for the historic meeting between Marshal Tito and Pope Paul on March 29th.

#### Looking Into the Meeting

At the entrance to Vatican City, President Tito and his wife were met by an escort of the Papal Swiss Guard. After greetings by Vatican officials, Marshal Tito was ushered alone into the Pontiff's study for the private audience.

In their meeting the Pope praised Tito for his efforts to promote world peace and for his appreciation of Vatican efforts in this area.

But the two leaders did far more than just exchange niceties. Grave problems, religion and world affairs were dis-

cussed, as the official communique related to the world. This harmonious meeting might portend the beginning of a new era of cooperation between Church and State.

The Pontiff assured President Tito he need not fear Church interference in the affairs of the state. "For itself," he said, "the Church only asks the legitimate freedom of carrying out its spiritual ministry and of offering its loyal services to man... without any personal interest foreign to its religious and moral mission."

Marshal Tito for his part, concentrated more on world affairs. He expressed concern about problems in both Southeast Asia and Africa, noting that the views of Yugoslavia and the Vatican on the major problems confronting the world were "close or identical." He expressed a hope that this harmony would continue.

President Tito gave major emphasis, however, to the problems of the Middle East. This is quite logical inasmuch as Yugoslavia is an important Mediterranean power and is greatly concerned with peace in this area. "It is therefore understandable that we devote special attention to the crisis in the Middle East and to the grave dangers inherent in it," he said.

In the Middle East, Yugoslavia is a staunch ally of the Arab States, particularly the United Arab Republic (Egypt). In fact, neither the Vatican nor Yugoslavia formally recognizes Israel, although there has been a Yugoslav consulate in Jaffa-Tel Aviv and commercial relations do exist. The *New York Times* reported that in his talks with the Pontiff, President Tito "made a strong presentation of the Arab cause in the Middle East conflict" (March 30, 1971 issue).

### Finding Common Ground — in Jerusalem

The *Times* went on to say that "Pope Paul reportedly restated the Vatican's request for an internationally guaranteed special status of Jerusalem and other holy places in Palestine."

The status of Jerusalem has in fact been a recurrent theme in recent Vatican

pronouncements. On March 24, the Vatican Weekly, *L'Osservatore della Domenica* advised that there could be no true peace in the Middle East without respect for the special status of Jerusalem as a universal religious shrine (Reuters). The Pontiff prior to this had called for recognition of the very unique conditions in Jerusalem as a city sacred to three major religions.

Even more pronounced was the Vatican statement in its daily *Osservatore Romano* that Israel was "suffocating" Christian and Moslem communities in Jerusalem. The paper particularly denounced taxation and new town planning as injurious to these communities.

Finally, on March 14 Pope Paul stated that the Vatican favors international protection for the holy places of Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine. Pope Paul called for some "international institution" to guarantee freedom of cult and access to the holy places and their maintenance (AP, March 25, 1971).

Immediately the question comes to mind as to *whom* or *what* would be the "international institution" to which Pope Paul is referring. The United Nations has no power other than whatever its constituent members might agree — if it is possible for them to agree — to give it. Could it be this is where Yugoslavia would enter the picture?

### The Israeli Response

In Israel, where using the term "Palestine" alone is enough to evoke an emotional and negative response, the reaction to all this in the press was rather angry.

Israelis are quick to point out that they fully allow each religion control of its own holy places, with free access to religious sites for all. Furthermore, they point out that when the Old City of Jerusalem was ruled by Jordan, and Jews and Israeli Christians were barred from their own holy places, Rome all the while kept silent.

Practically to a man, the Israelis reject internationalization of the city. They say that when the United Nations approved this concept back in 1947, it was the Jordanians who rejected it by annexing the Old City. Israel insists that

Jerusalem will never again be divided. Nor will Israel give up her age-old capital — which is now united under sovereign Jewish auspices for the first time in over 2000 years — under *any* conditions.

So there is obviously a problem — a serious problem. Can these differences be resolved peacefully and quietly by men of good will, each considering the needs of the other side as well as their own? We certainly hope so.

But we can do *more* than hope. We can read the Bible. We can know for certain the major political trends now developing in the Middle East. Bible prophecy clearly indicates that Jerusalem is destined to remain in the headlines for a long time to come. Zechariah 12:2-3 shows that many nations will concern themselves more and more with the fate of Jerusalem.

### "City of Peace?"

Jerusalem means "city of peace," and yet it has been fought over as often as any site on earth. And if mankind refuses to acknowledge the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it will be fought over once again. Only after that will men all over the world learn how to live with one another at peace. At *that* time Jerusalem's warfare shall be accomplished (Isa. 40:2) and the city shall become the "joy of all the earth." That will begin *Tomorrow's World*. David was inspired to write: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6) looking forward to this time of lasting peace.

Jerusalem is the most important religious site on earth. And organized religions of every shade are today making their weight felt in the dealings between the nations. History shows that more wars have been fought in the name of religion than over anything else. So we must now ask, will Tito continue his active interest in the Middle East? And, what will his next move be in cementing relations with the Vatican? What will happen when the 79-year-old Communist leader passes from the scene?

Keep your eyes focused on the outcome of the unprecedented developments now taking shape in Europe and the Near East. □